

Repentance Retreat Emails

By Scott Forsyth

Email Template #1

Hello all,

As we lead up to our Repentance Retreat, I want us to begin to get our hearts ready for God to work on them. I will be sending out emails this week about things for us to pray about, journal about, think about, and process through as the event draws near.

First, let's all realize our need to repent in the first place. One of the great hindrances to our retreat is a misguided belief we don't need to repent at all. We have all been in our group long enough to know that we can all stop acting like we don't need this retreat. Let's not pretend that we don't struggle with a multitude of sins. Here is a small list of mine, maybe you can relate: a judgmental heart, a self-righteous attitude, nagging anxieties, lust, gossip, and just a general belief I am better than other people. I know in my own life I have an ability to downplay and justify my own sins, while thinking critically about others and their sins.

This can be an altar event in all of our lives if we will open our hearts to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to work. To confess the things that weigh us down and let others pray for us, and *to be set free*. I must confess that even as I type these words there is still a nervousness in my belly about what will I really share, and what will I hold back. My prayer is that our retreat is a safe place where we hold nothing back from God and each other. How can we do that? I know that this should go without saying, but I am saying it anyway. For us to make it a safe environment, to have the freedom to be real, and share our sins and struggles, *nothing and I mean absolutely nothing leaves our retreat*. What is said and shared doesn't leave that room, period. Let it be a sanctuary of freedom to confess, repent, and leave our sins at the foot of the cross.

To start our week, please read the following verse meditatively and prayerfully from Psalm 139:23-24. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me, and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any off ensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Blessings,

_____ (Guide's name)

Email Template #2

Blessings fellow pilgrims,

Let's continue to prepare our hearts for repentance by looking at a sin that we sometimes don't recognize we are committing—idolatry! Idolatry is defined as "a worship of idols, extreme admiration, love or reverence for something."

So what is an idol? An idol is anything we believe we need, apart from Jesus, to make us happy or satisfied or complete. An idol arises when we desire something more than we desire Jesus. Idolatry is not too hard to find, because we all have very similar desires. Some of the things I'm about to list are not bad things, but when we desire it more than God it becomes an idol. Here are just some of things we want: love, joy, peace, freedom, status, identity, control, happiness, security, fulfillment, health, pleasure, significance, acceptance, and respect. My question to you, and to myself is, do we look to God to fulfill every one of these wants? If the answer is "no," which it is for me, then it is idolatry.

When God gave Moses and the Israelites the 10 commandments what was the first one? Exodus 20:3 says, "You shall have no other Gods before me." Nothing should be above our love for Christ, nothing. As I am writing, I am feeling prompted to confess some of

my idols:

- Reputation Idols: I have tried to carefully construct this public image that I have it all together, that I don't make mistakes.
- Fear Idols: This is related to the reputation idol. I fear what others think of me. It is more important for me to be accepted by others than accept who God says I am.
- Money Idols: I get more joy and pleasure from what money provides than from a deep intimate relationship with Jesus.
- Security Idols: I trust more in my own efforts, than trusting in God's provision and blessings.
- Children Idols: My children must have all the things I didn't, and must be viewed by others as great kids which in turn makes me look like a great parent.
- False Humility Idols: It's funny even as I'm writing all of these out I want you all to think what a deep spiritual guy I am as I humble myself.

I am amazed how insidious sin is, and how it can creep in unnoticed.

Lord, please save me from myself!!

_____ (Guide's name)

Email Template #3

Blessings all,

I am encouraged that the Repentance Retreat is in the forefront of all our minds. I have a couple of observations.

Consider the "Ice Bowl" football game in minus-four-degree weather. Would 80,000 people be there if it was a Spiritual Revival? Would you be there? Would I be there? Let's say it was a spiritual revival and it was minus-four-degrees. and you went. Does that make you any more spiritual? If you went to the football game, does that make you any less spiritual? Of course not. I can still love Jesus and go to a football game, or be an enemy of Jesus and go to a spiritual revival in bitter cold weather. It is *not* about activities; it is about the heart. More importantly, it is not about other people—it is about you and me. It is about our hearts, our sins, not everybody else's.

The more we can individually recognize our own personal need for repentance, our need for Christ, (not other people's need), the closer we will grow to Him.

We need to address the sin of self-righteousness. The goal here is to recognize our unbelief in Christ and, in turn, see the *belief in ourselves, and our own abilities*. Everyday, in very subtle ways, my actions and thoughts say that "I don't need God; I can do it myself."

Here are some of my self-righteous attitudes and how they spill out of me. Can you relate to any of these?

- Financial-Righteousness: "How could you spend your money on that? You don't know how to manage money? What a waste," all the while justifying my own spending habits.
- Theological-Righteousness: "How could you possibly believe in that? Don't you know any better?" While I am hiding any personal doubts I have.
- Political-Righteousness: "If you're a Christian there is only one political party that is right, the other is sinful."
- Kids-Righteousness: "My kids are better behaved than your kids."
- Health-Righteousness: "How can you eat that? Your body is a temple, and you don't treat it like one."
- Language-Righteousness: "You used the word 'fortunate' instead of saying 'blessed.' How spiritual are you?"
- Me-Righteousness: "How dare you criticize me!"

All of this self-righteousness leads ultimately to pride. Pride is me taking the place of Christ and living independently from God. Self-righteousness and pride are the cloaking devices that hide other sins from me. So it begins to spill out in other ways.

- Anger: "I am right and you're wrong!"

- Lust: A place I go to escape my frustration with life.

- Self-Pity: I am still self-absorbed, just in a negative way.

There are many more ways self-righteousness comes out in me. The key for all of us is to pray about it and let God reveal those areas in our lives of hidden self-righteousness. In my own life, if there is anytime I feel that I am better than someone else, or thankful I'm not like someone else, I know that the sin of self-righteousness and pride is not far behind.

Let me leave you with a Puritan Prayer:

Lord, you have brought me to the valley of vision

Where I live in depths but see you in heights;

hemmed in by mountains of sin I behold your glory

Let me learn by paradox that the way down is the way up

that to be low is to be high

that the broken heart is the healed heart

that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit,

that the repenting soul is the victorious soul,

that to have nothing is to possess all,

that to bear the cross is to wear the crown,

that to give is to receive,

that the valley is the place of vision.

_____ (Guide's name)

Email Template #4

Blessings all,

As we are in the process of becoming more aware of our sinfulness and our need for repentance, the next question is how close are our hearts to God? Are we truly repentant or not? Do we really hate our own sin or not?

Let's look at false repentance. There are three passages in the Bible that show false repentance.

1. Micah 6:6-8 (The Israelites)

2. 1 Samuel 15 (King Saul)

3. Matthew 27:3-5 (Judas)

In Micah, God wants us to be humble, live a repentant lifestyle, and to love others. The Israelites make very nice sacrifices that look good on the outside. They even are aware of their sin so they make physical offers, but that's not what God wants. He wants their hearts to turn back to Him.

In our retreat we could be very much like the Israelites, offering God some outward sacrifices: a three day fast, time away from our kids, a time of confession, yet not actually repenting or having a change of heart to stop doing the things God desires to see changed or healed.

In 1 Samuel 15, King Saul almost repents. He obeys most of what God wants him to do. When confronted with the fact that any tiny disobedience is still disobedience and a sin, Saul wants to focus on all he did right not what he did wrong. Ultimately, Saul is more

concerned about what other people think of him, and trying to look good, than hating his sin because it grieves God's heart.

In our group it will be easy to say; most of the time I'm a good person, but occasionally I do this or that wrong. This is minimizing my sins, and *almost* repenting.

In Matthew 27:3-5 Judas really looked and actually sounded repentant for what he did to Jesus. The key difference between Judas being truly repentant and false repentance is that he still focused on himself and not on Christ. He quickly tried to shift the guilt to others to make it their responsibility to let him off the hook. Judas (all the way up to when he hung himself) was trying to maintain control of his own life through manipulation and deception. He felt sorrow, but he didn't feel true sorrow which would lead to true repentance (See 2 Corinthians 7:9-10).

My prayer for all of us is that we will experience the kind of sorrow and hatred of sin that will lead us to the place of true repentance and change and direct our lives back to Jesus. Worldly sorrow makes us feel better for a while, but eventually find us back in the same sin patterns we had before. I hope I am not overwhelming you and inviting more questions than answers. If I am, please let me know, but I do have some encouraging news.

Tomorrow we will look at "true repentance" as we arrive at the eve of our fast, and how to hate our sin and be set free.

Blessings,

_____ (Guide's name)

Email Template #5

Blessings all, My friends, here we are on the eve of our fast. How are you feeling: nervous, excited, anxious,

sick, all of the above? We are all in this together. Let's be constantly praying for each other, and at anytime you're hurting or God is revealing something, let's keep the emails flowing to stay connected during the next three days.

Tonight we are going to look at an example of true repentance. Read Luke 15:11-32, the prodigal son. Do we recognize that the son is asking for his father's inheritance while his father is still alive? He is essentially wishing that his father was dead so he can go spend his money! So the prodigal son gets his wish for his father's money and runs off to feed his own sin. What a great example of how far sin separates us from our Heavenly Father. In Jeremiah 8:6 God laments saying, "No one repents of his wickedness, saying, what have I done?"

God is saying we know when we are sinning. We don't just look around and think how in the world did we get here? We will fully repent. Genuine repentance is going to be accompanied with a *new awareness of sin*. With this awareness comes a *piercing of the heart* where there are no more excuses or blaming, but true ownership of our sin. This is exactly what happens to the prodigal son, he finally acknowledges his sin. Read Luke 15:17. He turns back, turns away from, and stops committing the sin he is involved in and runs back to his father. When we compare the prodigal son to Saul and Judas from yesterday's email we see a stark contrast.

King Saul, for all his words, could never see his own sin and wouldn't acknowledge it. The same is said of Judas who felt sorrow for the consequences of his sin he was personally facing, but not sorrow for doing it in the first place and its affect on others. He was still totally self-focused. The key is that neither Saul nor Judas is actually broken; they admit

to as little as possible to get away with as much as possible. The prodigal admits to everything and all he really wants is just to be back in his father's presence again. He wants to be back in his father's presence because he knows his earthly father is kind and loving. How much more loving is our Heavenly Father! "God's kindness leads you to repentance" (Romans 2:4).

Some questions to ponder:

1. Does my repentance match my sin?
2. Am I repenting for my sin or just the consequences I am facing?
3. Am I confessing for a little bit of the sin, but wanting to be forgiven for all of it?
4. Am I afraid of what God might do to me if He knew the truth? Do I understand fully God's kindness and longing to forgive me?

Our repentance doesn't have to be perfect. It is also *not* a one-time event; it is continuous.

Repentance is foundational to our Christian life. *A repentant person is a humble person.* Why do we want to be humble? "For God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (Proverbs 3:34). God dwells with the humble, for God is Humble. "Jesus humbled himself to death on the cross" (Philippians 2:8). Christ is gentle and "humble in heart" (Matthew 11:29). God uses humble people who are living for God's glory, not their own. Humility is the life and character of God. Humility pours out God's blessings of love, forgiveness, mercy and salvation. True repentance is the key to true humility, which is central to our Hearts being transformed (review pages XX-XX). Just in case you were wondering why we are fasting: *to humble our souls for true repentance!*

Blessings,
